



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FINAL DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY TO \$120,000 BANK FRAUD CONSPIRACY, COUNTERFEIT PAYROLL CHECKS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Kansas City, Mo., man pleaded guilty in federal court today to participating in a conspiracy to commit bank fraud by passing counterfeit payroll checks.

Eric J. Sharpe, 31, of Kansas City, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Fernando J. Gaitan this morning to the charges contained in a May 17, 2005, federal indictment.

By pleading guilty today, **Sharpe** admitted that he participated in a conspiracy to commit bank fraud by passing counterfeit payroll checks that had been created with a digital scanner and personal computer. Members of the conspiracy cashed more than \$120,000 in counterfeit payroll checks, Graves said, from Aug. 22, 2001, to Jan. 30, 2003.

Sharpe arranged to have identification portraying himself as “Lawrence Whorten” and cashed five counterfeit checks totaling \$3,188. **Sharpe** agreed to split the proceeds of those checks with other conspirators.

Sharpe is the final co-defendant to plead guilty among 13 co-defendants who have pleaded guilty or been sentenced in the conspiracy. Five co-defendants have been sentenced:

* **Markella Y. Fenley**, 30, of Kansas City, was sentenced on Jan. 5, 2006, to two years in federal prison without parole. **Fenley** pleaded guilty on June 22, 2005, to her role in the conspiracy.

* **Kareem A. Abernathy**, 29, of Kansas City, was sentenced on Nov. 15, 2005, to eight months in federal prison without parole. **Kareem Abernathy** pleaded guilty on July 22, 2006, to his role in the conspiracy. **Kareem Abernathy** admitted that he cashed two counterfeit checks,

purporting to be drawn on the Greater KC Link, Inc., account, on Feb. 18, 2003, at United Missouri Bank offices in Kansas City and Raytown for a total of \$642.

* **Kevin D. Abernathy**, 26, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced on Nov. 22, 2005, to one day in federal prison. The court also ordered **Kevin Abernathy** to pay \$1,541 in restitution. **Kevin Abernathy** pleaded guilty on July 18, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy. **Kevin Abernathy** agreed to cash some of the counterfeit checks, Graves said, with the understanding that he would keep \$200 as his share of the proceeds of any checks successfully passed. **Kevin Abernathy** admitted that he cashed three counterfeit checks, purporting to be drawn on the Greater KC Link, Inc., account, on Feb. 18, 2003, at United Missouri Bank offices in Kansas City and Raytown for a total of \$1,880.

* **Damon Washington**, 29, of Kansas City, was sentenced on Nov. 21, 2005, to one year in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered **Washington** to pay \$1,249 in restitution. **Washington** pleaded guilty on July 22, 2005, to bank fraud. **Washington** admitted that he cashed two counterfeit payroll checks totaling \$1,249 at United Missouri Bank branches in Kansas City.

* **Rochelle Abernathy**, 48, of Kansas City, was sentenced on Nov. 18, 2005, to seven months in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered **Rochelle Abernathy** to pay \$8,365 in restitution. **Rochelle Abernathy** pleaded guilty on Aug. 17, 2005, to her role in the conspiracy. **Rochelle Abernathy** admitted that she cashed 14 counterfeit payroll checks, sometimes using a fraudulently obtained Kansas driver's license belonging to another person, totaling \$8,365 at Gold Bank, Bank of America, First National Bank of Kansas and Douglas Bank from Aug. 17, 2001, to April 28, 2002.

Seven co-defendants have pleaded guilty and await sentencing:

* **Martinus Anton Sayles**, 29, of Kansas, pleaded guilty on Feb. 7, 2006, to his role in the conspiracy. **Sayles** admitted that he accepted counterfeit checks printed by co-defendant **Willie S. Cunningham, Jr.**, 32, of Kansas City, and distributed by **Cunningham**. **Matinus Sayles** cashed 16 counterfeit checks totaling \$17,583.

* **Cunningham** pleaded guilty on Feb. 6, 2006, to his role in the conspiracy and to bank fraud. **Cunningham** admitted that he used a personal computer and digital scanner to create counterfeit checks. After scanning genuine checks, **Cunningham** used computer software to apply the bank routing numbers, account numbers, authorized signatures, and business or bank logos onto check paper to create the counterfeit checks, utilizing magnetic ink so that the routing and account numbers would be accepted by check verification equipment at banks and retail establishments.

* **James Diamond Wainwright**, 53, address unknown, pleaded guilty on Feb. 6, 2006, to his role in the conspiracy.

* **Ahmed J. Johnson**, 29, of Kansas City, pleaded guilty on Feb. 1, 2006, to his role in

the conspiracy. **Johnson** admitted that he cashed a \$638 counterfeit payroll check at a United Missouri Bank branch on March 21, 2003, and a \$569 counterfeit payroll check at a United Missouri Bank branch on March 26, 2003.

* **Maurice S. Sayles**, 29, of Kansas City, pleaded guilty on Jan. 27, 2006, to his role in the conspiracy. **Maurice Sayles** admitted that he passed or attempted to pass 32 counterfeit payroll checks at banks throughout the metropolitan area between August 2001 and April 2003, resulting in a loss to the banks of approximately \$34,000.

* **Kelli P. Carr**, 21, of Kansas City, pleaded guilty on Dec. 2, 2005, to bank fraud. **Carr** admitted that she cashed seven counterfeit payroll checks totaling \$3,964 at United Missouri Bank offices in Kansas City and Raytown on Feb. 18, 2003. She also attempted to cash a \$528 counterfeit payroll check on April 10, 2003.

* **Eniko Gal**, 28, of Kansas City, pleaded guilty on Nov. 8, 2005, to her role in the conspiracy. **Gal** passed three counterfeit checks at branches of United Missouri Bank on Feb. 24, 2003.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John E. Cowles. It was investigated by the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department, the U.S. Secret Service, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow